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# SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 334. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 25, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.



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# SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 334.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 25, 1895.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

# THE LILAC WITCH

"IT can't be as bad as that, Sophie. Must your father have 20,000 francs by the first of January?"

"Yes, Henri, dear, or else"—her lip quivered a little—"or else the mortgage will be foreclosed, and father will lose all his land, and we shall be homeless."

"Not if I can help it," said Henri, stoutly.

Sophie looked proudly at him, and then at the wall of the studio. What an artist Henri was!

She came to him, and laying her hand gently on his shoulder, gazed sadly into his eyes, and said:

"I know, Henri, I know. But then you are poor now."

"I will rise—get a picture into the Salon—make money——"

"Yes, dear; but if papa loses all his property; and, besides——" and her grey eyes grew moist, and she looked wistfully away.

"And, besides?" repeated Henri, with anxious inquiry.

"And, besides, papa has been hinting at the marriage proposals of Jean Bertrand, an old playmate of mine, who offers to pay off all the mortgage on the day of his betrothal to me."

"To you, Sophie! You don't mean that you—that your father——"

Sophie looked sadly at a neat little pair of feet.

"Henri, you know I love you, and that I have promised faithfully to be your wife; but think of poor papa, and think of all I owe him. Oughtn't I to be ready to make any sacrifice to save him from ruin?"

Then they both looked sadly away in silence. Suddenly Henri squeezed Sophie's hand so hard that she started violently.

"Wait, Sophie," he exclaimed, "I've got a plan. We—you and I—can earn that twenty thousand."

"Yes, yes; how?"

"Why, you be my model, and I'll paint you."

"Oh, will you? But—but you couldn't sell a picture of *me* for twenty thousand francs."

In answer Henri drew her before a little square mirror, hung between the two windows, and made her look at her own reflection.

"See there, Sophie. Just look at your eyes; are they not the deepest grey, with golden lights in them? and are not your lips as red as this carmine? and just see that little pointed chin, how I could paint that; and those pink cheeks—fresh as a baby's!"

Sophie began to blush at Henri's enthusiasm, and turning from the glass, looked into his dark face, which was lit up with the glow of an almost poetic inspiration.

"And, you know," he went on, "something tells me that I shall paint you better than I have ever painted anything before—that you will be my inspiration. You must wear a loosely fitting lilac—very soft lilac—robe, and you will have your hair down, hanging down over your left shoulder, which will peep through your curls like a white dove in a golden cage. And you must hold a spray of lilacs in your hand, and be reclining under a lilac bush, and I'll call you the Lilac Witch.

"Didn't you ever hear of the legend of the Witch? She was a very beautiful fairy, and man came to catch a smile from her red lips, and the man she smiled on was made bold to do high deeds; but if his heart was drawn away to another woman, in a moment she spoiled all he had done, and made a beggarly wretch of him. Besides, you know, the lilac will go so well with your complexion and hair and eyes."

And so it was planned. The sittings were daily. Sophie was a very patient model, and Henri was full of inspiration, and worked with a certainty of success. He made studies of her face in all possible moods and expressions, till, by culling what was most entrancing in each, he began to create an ideal.

He threw the whole vigour of his poetic soul into his work, striving to get that longing, inspiring look in the large, grey eyes which, mingled with an expression, half of pity, half of triumph, in the rest of the face, was to make up the ideal of the Lilac Witch. He found the look of longing and inspiration in Sophie's eyes but the pity and triumph—that divine mixture of pride in victory and sorrow for the conquered—were wanting. By his own talent, Henri created them, inspired by his love and the prize set before him.

One day in December he was working away with his brush while Sophie reclined on the model's platform. He could see how tired she was. His own face showed that, but for the indomitable fire in his black eyes, he would have given out long ago. But the day of foreclosing the mortgage drew on apace. Still to-day was a happy day—Henri had a surprise for Sophie, and as he occasionally searched his palette for colours, the corners of his mouth twitched with his suppressed secret.

Sophie was just saying how Jean Bertrand kept repeating his offer to her father, and how, as the days went by and the first of January approached, her father seemed more and more inclined to accept. Henri smiled sweetly.

"Very good for M. Bertrand," he said; "but I have something to tell you. Something splendid—superb," and he kissed his hand with a theatrical gesture.

"Oh! what is it?" exclaimed Sophie, jumping up and spoiling the folds of her carefully arranged drapery.

Henri forgave her that for the sake of the news. Then he told her that the agent of a rich Englishman was looking all

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over Paris for paintings of beautiful women; how he had seen the Lilac Witch, now nearly finished, and how he had, with a millionaire's extravagance, offered the fabulous sum of 30,000 francs. That ended the sitting for that day, for Sophie insisted on taking Henri at once to her father, telling him the news, and making him break off all further negotiations with Jean Bertrand.

And so it was arranged. Henri was to pay off the mortgage as soon as the picture was transferred, keeping the surplus of 10,000 francs to start life with Sophie, while her father dismissed Jean Bertrand, with the precautionary hint that, in case the Englishman should fail them, he would immediately accept Bertrand's offer.

It was the evening before the great day when the picture was to be formally sold, the 30,000 francs handed over, and Henri and Sophie married. Henri was in the studio, standing before the picture. In one hand he held a lighted cigarette, in the other an acutely-pointed paint-brush. He was scrutinising the face of his beloved Lilac Witch with a look of intense exultation. Every now and then he would make an infinitesimal stroke with the brush, after which he would take a long pull at the cigarette, letting the smoke slowly exude from his mouth and nose in a manner that bespoke keen satisfaction.

He was putting on what he called the last touches before he said good-night to the picture, and went to call on Sophie. He looked at his watch. It was already past nine, and he had promised to be there at eight. Still there were only a few more tiny touches needed, and then he would go.

He lit cigarette after cigarette, he walked up and down the room, changed the lamps, and surveyed the painting from twenty points of view. Finally, he seemed satisfied, threw down the brush, drew a sofa up in front of the easel, and lay there watching the Witch's face with a lover's rapture. His chest heaved, his eyes grew bright, the muscles round his mouth softened into an expression of supreme delight.

Suddenly he started and looked at his watch. It was twelve o'clock and he had forgotten, and Sophie had probably gone to bed, wondering why he never came. He blamed himself for being so thoughtless.

This changed the current of his thoughts, reminding him that to-morrow he married Sophie, and they would always live together; a bright smile lit up his face, but it was a commonplace smile compared to his look of a few seconds ago. Yes, to-morrow Sophie would be his, and they would come and pay him 30,000 francs and take away the Lilac Witch. Take away the Lilac Witch? Why, of course; he had only painted it for the sake of marrying Sophie.

Henri looked away from the picture with a dull ache at his heart. Somehow, life with Sophie, when the Lilac Witch was gone, did not seem so sweet as it used to in the old days when they had the first sitting. Then the picture only meant to him the portrait of his dear Sophie. Now, when he was gazing into that fair, arch face on the canvas, so triumphant, and yet so pitying and tender, he never thought of its being Sophie's face at all. He seemed to see there something that was all his own and had come out of his own soul. How could he bear to part with it? But he was winning Sophie by giving it up. A horrible doubt came to him. What if after all he should love the picture better than the model? He shook his head resolutely, and went to bed. All that night in his dreams that awful doubt tormented him.

On the morrow Sophie appeared before the hour of the business transactions, so as to tidy up the studio. She found Henri there before the picture as usual. He had wheeled the easel up near the window, and was devouring the painting with his eyes. He never so much as turned his head to greet her.

He saw there, on a bank of moss, half sitting, half reclining, a beautiful woman, the image of his sweetheart, yet wearing an intangible something about the eyes and mouth, something that Henri, with feelings of misgiving, felt that Sophie had not. The wavy, light brown hair, hanging in ringlets over the bare shoulder, and the vermilion tint of the pure cheek, were simply a clever copy of Sophie's charms

But in the grey eyes was a look that seemed to tell of a great, unsatisfied longing, for love—or, perhaps, victory—while the delicate, slightly curving lips had a tender, pitying expression that was strangely contradicted by the pointed chin, which boded forth a scornful joy of triumph—perhaps the very triumph which the eyes were longing for, and whose victim the mouth pitied. The very compositeness of the face, full of contradiction, was the origin of its charm.

Henri looked long at the face, and then turned and glanced half timidly, half hopefully, at Sophie. She thought she caught his meaning, and smiled back at him.

"Is it like?" she laughed.

Henri's face lost the look of hope. He turned eagerly back to the picture, looked at it a minute, then turned away with a sigh. Sophie came to him, and, looking over his shoulder at the lovely reflection of herself, asked him why he sighed. He answered:

"Ah, Sophie, you cannot understand, you cannot know the feeling of adoration which an artist has for something into which he has poured his whole soul. This is my masterpiece. I shall never do anything as good again, no, never! All the strength, all the purity, all the poetry of my inmost soul are embodied in that one painting, and now—now, I must part with it; must say good-bye for ever to what has been meat and drink to me for months past. You cannot know what it has come to mean to me: how I have worshipped it as I created it. It is more than a portrait. It is an ideal in which I have lived for months. Oh, where, where shall I find anything to take its place?"

And Henri, kneeling before the picture, spread out his hands in supplication. Sophie knelt beside him, and gently passing one arm over his shoulder, whispered softly to him, as if they already knelt before the altar:

"Henri, Henri, here I am! Have you not me? Did you not paint that picture to marry me? And now it's done, are we not to be married, and you are to have me always?"

She paused. Henri gazed long and steadily, with a blank, searching look, into her sweet pale face. Then he turned towards the Lilac Witch, shuddered, and sorrowfully shook his head. He noticed that in a spot near the edge of the canvas the varnish had worn a little rough. He got up from his knees, and, pushing aside a curtain, went into a side room to get a pot of varnish.

Sophie remained motionless, kneeling before the picture, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing, her hands clutching convulsively at her dress. She repeated his last words: "'Where shall I find anything to take its place?'"

Jealousy, cruel as the grave, jealousy of her own self, jealousy of the image of her own person reflected in the artist's imagination, was taking hold of her. Oh, how she hated the picture that had stolen her only possession; had cheated her of Henri's love! She rose and looked savagely at the lovely Lilac Witch. Then, glancing wildly round the room for a weapon, she spied on a little table Henri's mixing-knife. It was of steel and quite sharp. She ran to it, seized it, and then coming up so close that her hot breath made the canvas moist, she hissed:

"There, you thief, you!"—and with a few strokes of the knife, she cut and slashed the lovely face and tore out the grey eyes, and hacked the poor head and bosom into shreds. Then, throwing back her head, she stood upright, panting and trembling before her disfigured rival.

At that second it seemed as if the scornful, pitying, triumphant look of the Lilac Witch had passed to her own face.

Just then came a rustle at the curtain and a rattle at the door. Henri slipped in quietly from the inner room, and Sophie's father came bustling in from the hall. The two men came forward and greeted one another cordially; then they turned towards Sophie and the picture.

With a sharp cry Henri bounded forward, and pressing his forehead against the mutilated painting, cried like a child.

Sophie looked wildly about, and staggered towards her father. He roughly led her to a chair. Then, pulling his hat over his ears, he said hoarsely, half aloud:

"I must go and find Jean Bertrand."

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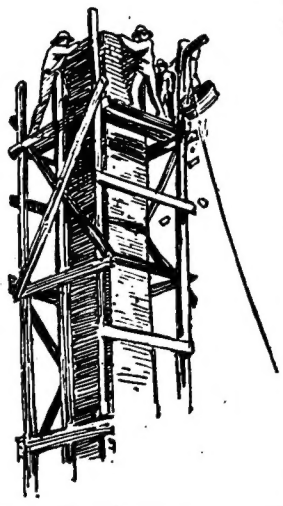
# On the Chimney



"LAST summer," said Dannie McLean, the mason, to his friends at the "Dog's Tail," "I took a contract to build a chimney for the tanning company at Millville. It was to be eighty-two feet high, and they wanted the job hurried through.

"The foundation and lower part were plain sailing; but as we got higher I had trouble with my help. The local men became frightened, and left one after another, till at last I had to send back home here for Charley French.

"You see, at that height, hod-carrying was out of the question, so we had a block and tackle rigged, and lifted all our stuff by horse-power. The upper block was fastened to one of the upright posts of the staging; the lower one to a post sunk in the ground.

"It was not a very safe arrangement, as we could not make the staging very secure. But we got a quiet, steady horse, and a cautious chap for driver, and didn't feel as though there was much danger.

"There were six uprights in the staging. Of course, each of them was not all one stick. They had to be spliced about every twenty feet. This made three joints in each upright, and they were far from being firm.

"Down nearer the ground, where the brickwork had hardened, and the staging was well fastened to the chimney, it was all right; but the upper part of it was decidedly unsteady. The posts creaked and vibrated more or less every time a bucketful of brick or mortar came up.

"We had made a bet of a bottle of whiskey with the manager of the company that we would finish the work by Saturday evening. At dinner-time that day it was so certain we were going to win easily that Charley suggested to the manager that he had better pay half the bet in advance, in the shape of a flask of whiskey. He agreed; and we took the flask up with us to finish off on.

"We had drunk most of it, and had only one more course of bricks to lay, when the son of the manager made his way up beside us. He was a wide-awake, independent-looking youngster, fourteen or fifteen years of age, but he had no right to be there. He would have been sent down in a hurry if the whiskey hadn't made us a little too easy-going.

"As it was, we both had sense enough to order him to leave at once. Instead of obeying, he put his hands into his pockets, eyed us knowingly for a moment, and remarked:

"'Aren't you two a little high, for eighty feet above ground?'

"We laughed, and let him stay. He moved about the staging, not in the least disturbed by the elevation. Finally, when he got tired of looking about, he picked up a hatchet which had been in use for driving nails, and began chipping at one of the posts.

"In the meantime the last brick was laid. We finished the whiskey, and gave three cheers, while the boy stood watching us with anything but respectful eyes. Charley French was leaning against the chimney with the empty flask in his hand, looking somewhat tipsy.

"'See here, Dannie,' said he, solemnly, 'there's the old horse down yonder, and we've forgotten all about him. He's seen us right through this job, and he hasn't been offered so much as a smell of the whiskey.'

"'Hello, old chap! Here's the flask for you, anyway,' he suddenly shouted, as he gave it a toss.

"It went flashing and circling through the air, and fell with a crash on a big stone just behind the horse, whose driver was with a crowd of loafers some twenty or thirty yards away.

"The horse gave a frightened leap, and galloped off at a speed that I hadn't thought was in him. The rope whizzed over the pulleys, and the half-filled bucket shot up towards us like a rocket.

"It came against the upper block with a crash that threatened the overthrow of the whole staging. Posts swayed and bent at their joints; boards, loose bricks, and tools slipped from their places and went rattling down below.

"We clutched at the top of the chimney as the steadiest object within reach. But the newly-laid brick moved under our hands, and gave little promise of holding us up.

"The horse was checked for a moment when the bucket came against the upper block; but he bent wildly to his traces, and the fastening of the lower block gave way. He had now a direct purchase on the upper corner of the staging.

"The only thing which saved it from being torn away at the first tug was the horse being unable to bring his full strength to bear. The rope ascended at an angle which lifted the traces above his back, and shifted the strain from his shoulders to his neck. He was half choked and thrown to the ground.

"The staging groaned and reeled as he struggled to get on his feet again. His driver stood stupidly looking up at us without moving a step. The whole thing happened in so few seconds, that it is not much wonder the man's presence of mind left him. The horse scrambled to his knees, then to his feet, and pulled frantically. The strain at the top of the chimney became frightful. It seemed as though not only the staging, but the whole upper part of the chimney would be pulled away and fall at the next plunge.

"Neither Charley nor I had spoken a word. We just held on, and gasped and wondered how it would feel when everything gave way. And we forgot all about the manager's son until he spoke up behind us:

"'It's about time to cut the rope, isn't it?'

"Before we could turn our heads there was a sharp click of the block. The clean-cut end of the rope shot downward.

"The boy stood with the hatchet in his hand, watching the horse. Of course, the moment the rope was cut the straining animal pitched forward.

"'It'd be a good thing for you two men if you were just as frightened of rum bottles as old Dobbin down there seems to be,' remarked the boy calmly, as the horse disappeared round a corner, while the rope trailed behind him like a long snake.

"Charley and I were both sober enough by that time, and we wanted to shake hands with the manager's son, but he refused.

"'No use making a fuss,' he said. 'I happened to have your hatchet in my hand, and I cut the rope. That's all. Another pull from Dobbin would have brought the whole thing down, and that'd have been about as rough on me as you.'

"So you see, I came near not curling any this winter, concluded Dannie, but as it is, I'll just quit the 'conveeviaulity' o' the game."

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# THE WEARER OF THE VICTORIA CROSS

THE soldiers are coming into the city.

The clank of swords and sounds of horses' hoofs, and then the band commences to play as it leads the sunburnt warriors through the old town of Chesterbury—the horses tossing their heads to the sound of the music.

At the head of his regiment rides Major Clement Homfreys, V.C.—familiarly known to his body of horse as "Old Clem"—his tall, martial figure, set off by the elaborate uniform of the "Devil's Own," being a prominent attraction.

Many a little heart fluttered, and many a sly, winning glance was cast, as he rode forward, the admired of all, he—the hero of the Egyptian Campaign and the wearer of the coveted Victoria Cross.

But the iron-grey warrior saw nothing of the bewitching smiles and sly glances, but, like an automaton, rode on through the narrow streets into the barrack-square, with its blocks of greystone buildings which constituted the new quarters of this regiment.

In a few days the excitement had abated and society imagined that dull times had passed now the acknowledged smart and fashionable regiment were ensconced within the walls of their town.

Neither were they to be disappointed, for before long polo, ennis, military dances, and all kindred sports dear to youth, were in full swing.

But the Major did not join in the gaiety, but spent his time in antiquarian research among the cloisters and historical landmarks with which the old cathedral city abounds.

"Society" at first resented this slight from their idol, but, finding argument of no avail, very reluctantly slipped the prosy Major for the acknowledged smart set of officers attached to the regiment.

So things went on, month after month, and Homfreys was left in peace to lead the sleepy existence he had mapped out for himself. But one day a fresh era opened in his mundane life.

It was while strolling through the Cathedral grounds in research that he came across a young lady painting at her easel.

Without thinking what he was doing, he wandered up behind the artist, and looking over her shoulder stood, for some minute or two, admiring the half-finished water-colour.

Then, suddenly seeing the lady about to move, and realising the apparent show of bad taste on his part, he lifted his hat, and mumbled out some indistinct words of apology and regret.

"There is no need of an apology," she said, turning to him. "I take it as a great compliment that you should care to look at my poor efforts."

"Scarcely that," he replied. "I was attracted by the cleverness of your work, and that must be my excuse for intrusion."

"Ah! Major Homfreys, like all officers, you are not above flattery," she answered, with a sweet smile and the least suspicion of colour mounting to her cheek—and then she turned to pack up her easel and sketching pad. The Major seized the opportunity and begged to be allowed to help her. Receiving assent, he went down on his knees to arrange the portable apparatus.

For a few minutes there was an awkward silence—both experiencing shyness in each other's company.

"Now, come, tell me how you knew I was a soldier," he said at last, and without looking up.

"What modesty!" she replied. "As if all Chesterbury does not know Major Homfreys, the wearer of the Victoria Cross. Has not the description of how the hero rode out under heavy fire and saved the life of a wounded soldier been published in all our local journals?" this with an admiring little laugh.

Shall it be admitted that he, the hero of many a fight, and one of England's most gallant warriors, blushed at the words of praise issuing from the lips of a little country maiden? But indeed it was a fact, and his shyness and awkwardness increased.

He tarried over the packing of the easel until his equanimity was re-established, and then sprang to his feet with a bright look in his eye unusual to him.

"And now let us come to a mutual understanding," he said. "You seem to know everything about me, won't you tell me the name of the artist who delights to hide her artistic abilities in this little place?"

"You know my father, surely, Major?" she replied. "He is the mayor of the borough—my name is Edith Chester"—this in the meekest of voices. "Papa, as you must have heard, has a strong prejudice to soldiers; but, believe me, there is a reason for it. My brother ran away from home, years ago, and enlisted in a regiment that was sent out on foreign service. The shock unsettled papa for a long, long time, and now we are forbidden even so much as to mention my poor brother Fred's name."

"Is that possible?" said the soldier kindly. "Accept my sincere regrets, Miss Chester, for intruding myself upon you."

"I think you make a mistake," she said hesitatingly. "The prejudice to soldiers rests with papa alone. I—er—you must please excuse me now, I am long behind my time, and they will be waiting tea for me." And with a red face, and not noticing the extended hand of the Major, she picked up her easel and case and ran off through the grounds.

For the rest of the day the Major walked about with a pleasant smile, which was duly noticed by his officers, and many theories were advanced as to its probable cause by the smart throng in the large billiard-room attached to the barracks.

But the Major knew nothing of this, and, indeed, such remarks had no chance of coming to his ears.

On the following afternoon his steps took him again to the Cathedral grounds, and, with pleasure, he saw his little friend seated at her easel deeply interested in her work.

She turned at the sound of his footsteps, and came forward with an outstretched hand and a sweet smile to greet him.

He took her hand within his grasp and looked tenderly down into the grey eyes upturned to his, while both hearts beat quickly.

Then he turned to the picture with a few complimentary criticisms on the girl's work.

"It seems so strange," she said, in answer, "that you soldiers should have time to care for this sort of thing."

"Perhaps I'm an odd sort of soldier," he replied, looking down upon her.

"I think you are a very nice sort of soldier!" she answered—and then, noticing a smile lurking under the heavy moustache, added—"of course, I mean to come and admire my poor little picture."

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So they both stood, somewhat abashed, yet happy in each other's company, not noticing the approach of a grey-headed gentleman, who came striding towards them, with evident anger written on his face.

They turned simultaneously at the sound of footsteps, and then the girl shrunk back with the startled cry of "Father!"

The situation was a delicate one for the Major, but, in the presence of his own sex, he found words and endeavoured to explain his intrusion on Miss Chester.

"I have nothing to say to you, Major Homfreys," the Mayor answered curtly. "It came to my knowledge that my daughter had been seen in your company, and I thought it my duty to come and escort her home."

"How can you act so rudely, papa?" the girl cried. "This gentleman was merely looking at my drawing, and——"

"Enough," said the Mayor. "The introduction to Major Homfreys was not my seeking; besides, you can finish your work at some other time. For the present, I want you at home."

With tears in her eyes the girl packed her easel and accompanied her father from the grounds, leaving the soldier standing there, gnawing his moustache.

"And to think that she will suffer for my sake," he thought, as he walked moodily back to the barracks.

"Old Clem" is down again on his luck, was the verdict of the select few—assembled that evening in the billiard-room.

. . . . .

Three weeks had gone by and Major Homfreys had not once caught sight of his divinity. He realised now what it meant to be parted from her. He, the callous disciplinarian, who for years had resisted the attractions of the opposite sex, was now pining for the presence of a little country girl—and day by day the furrows seemed to be deepening in his forehead.

One evening, on returning to his rooms, he found a letter written in a strange hand awaiting him.

With a nervousness not to be accounted for, he tore open the envelope, and read:

"Langlebury, Chesterbury.

"DEAR MAJOR HOMFREYS,

"I have such good news for you—my brother has returned home and made peace with my father, to the great happiness of us all.

*Edith Chester.*

"But there is a certain amount of secrecy between them that I can't quite understand; but my father wishes me to make an informal request that you will honour us with a visit this evening.

"May I, on my own behalf, tell you how pleased I shall be to see you?

"Yours very sincerely,

"EDITH CHESTER."

The Major read the letter again and again, scarcely believing his own eyes—what did it all mean?

Ten minutes later he knocked at the door of the Mayor's residence and was shown into the reception-room, where he was met by Mr. Chester himself.

"Major Homfreys," said the Mayor, grasping his hand, "I have to make a sincere apology for my rudeness to you in the Cathedral grounds some days back. Let me commence by formally greeting you and introducing my daughter Edith and my eldest son, Fred."

As he spoke a sturdy young fellow came forward and saluted the officer:

"Major Homfreys," the young man said, "you don't know me by the name of Chester, but you will remember me in Egypt under the name of Private Easton, and I shall never forget you, Sir, for *you* saved my life at the risk of your own."

The Major stood dumfounded at the working out of events. Then he found his tongue:

"Mr. Chester," he said gravely, "when I had the fortune to save your life, I did only what hundreds of others would have done under such desperate circumstances, and in return you gained for me the Victoria Cross; so you see I have been well repaid for any risk I ran," and he shook the young man's hand heartily, while the Mayor and his daughter stood smiling at the unexpected meeting.

It was a happy little party that sat down to late dinner that evening, and many stories of military heroism were told by the young sergeant that brought a colour to the Major's face and admiring glances from Miss Edith, seated at the officer's side.

. . . . . .

From a fashionable paper some six months later:

"ON the 26th inst., at Chesterbury Cathedral, Major Clement Homfreys, V.C., of the Royal Fordshire Regiment, to Edith, daughter of Frederick Henry Chester, Esq., of Langlebury, Chesterbury."

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# THE BLACK PEARL

## A NIGHT IN ACAPULCO.

THE harbour of Acapulco is an ideal one for shelter, and, after the steamer is once at anchor, it is a source of mystery to the passengers who have not been on deck how she ever entered the quiet little bay. The high, blue mountains in the background, the tall palms and tropical green down to the water's edge; along the shore the tiled and thatched houses—among the oldest on the coast; and, on the rising ground to the right, the ancient fort and military prison. All these make a sight that fills a lover of the picturesque with enthusiasm. The waters about the steamer are thick with the boats and dugouts of the bumboat-women and dirty native boys peddling fruit, shells, pearls, and a world of indescribables, all keeping up a constant din of jabbering jargon, that, with the hundreds of half-naked natives passing from the ships to the lighters discharging cargo, makes an exciting scene, in sharp contrast to the peaceful outlook on the shore beyond.

From the ship the city seems but a collection of small adobes, scattered here and there along the hillside, with an occasional long, white building in view. But no sooner has the traveller passed the gates of the custom-house than a little city of twelve thousand inhabitants lies before him under the shelter of the hill, with thriving stores thronged with dark-

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eyed señoritas and men in white linen or bespangled velvet, many of the latter with the flaming *serape* hanging over the shoulder.

Edmund Warren represented the English house. He had taken the place of the traveller who for years had made the annual visit to the Mexican seaport. He had never seen Acapulco before, nor had Henry Sanford, who accompanied him on this trip. They had only just landed and become settled in the miserable excuse for a hotel in time to enjoy a delicious *comida*, when they felt an impulse to join the throngs which filled the clean-paved streets as evening came and night soon followed the footsteps of the sultry day.

Passing down the street leading by the stores, the market, and the plaza, just behind the custom-house, a small place under sheltering palms opened to view, where, night after night, the lower classes assembled to watch the fandango. The crowd of dark-skinned men and women, all dressed in the garb of the locality, stood out in the dim light of the long torches planted here and there among the throng, like ghosts of departed señoritas and caballeros. All were watching the couples dancing the monotonous clog-quadrille on the low platform to the music of drum, tambourine, and guitar.

The Englishmen had mingled with the throng about the dancers, watching alternately the platform and the groups of girls about. Soon soft eyes had discovered the strangers, and coquettish glances went out from beneath long lashes. Warren was never happy unless in love, and in love with every pretty face that came across his path. His heart beat faster as he caught the glances shot at himself and Henry, and he nearly pinched the latter's arm off as a smile came from a dark-eyed beauty on the edge of the throng.

"Gad, Henry! Such eyes! Did you ever see their like?" he exclaimed. "I must see where she lives. Are you with me?" And he rubbed his hands in anticipation of an adventure. Henry was quite as ready for a lark as his companion.

Ten o'clock. The dancing was over, and the crowd scattered through the dark streets.

"You had better look out for that tall Mexican with your beauty, Ned. He may stick a knife into us," cautioned Henry.

"Nonsense! Come on," was the other's rejoinder.

They did not notice the native police—not uniformed, but armed—following some distance behind as the Englishmen dogged the footsteps of the first conquest of the amorous Warren; nor did they know their custom of "running in" the foreigner on any pretext whatever for the revenue of the paltry fine. Muriella Narvaez knew full well that her new admirers were close behind, and so did her tall lover. He bade her good-night as Warren and Sanford passed, and went back towards the plaza. If the Englishmen could have heard his consultation with Old China, the bumboat woman and character of Acapulco, they might even now be back in their native city.

The young men retraced their steps, and found the olive-skinned beauty still in the door. They saluted. The bow was returned.

"*Adelante*, señors," a pretty voice said, and they accepted, with alacrity, the invitation to enter. Candles burned dimly in a corner filled with bottles—*mescal*, *aguardiente*, and *tequila*. Several other girls, quite as pretty as the captor of Warren's transitory affections, were seated about, some on stools and some on the low couch in the corner; two had guitars.

"Here's luck, Henry," whispered Warren, and they were soon quite at home in the little white adobe, though to Henry there seemed something uncanny about the place. To the Englishmen, used to the luxurious fittings of a metropolitan home, the bare walls and dirty floors, covered with palm *patates*, were a new experience.

While laughter and song came from the little house, and the Englishmen were whispering love-nothings in the ears of newly found *amoureux*, in another house, not far from the water, more serious words were passing between Old China and the tall lover of Muriella. The old dealer in green cocoa-nuts and occult mysteries was listening with ill-concealed pleasure to the man who was begging a favour at her hands. No love-scrape about the shores of that pretty bay ever escaped her notice, and nothing pleased the stout old bum-boat woman so much as to be sought out by the amorous of the upper classes to listen to such information from her lips as is sought from the "second-sight" mediums of our own country.

"So you want to *buy* the Black Pearl? To *buy* it! You fool!" shrieked Old China, when the Mexican had finished his story. "What do you know about it?"

"I know what was said when the *commandante* was found dead, and that the police were afraid to search for it. Five hundred pesos for its use to-night—that is all I ask."

"The police are fools, and you are a fool! I know nothing about the Black Pearl."

"Come, China. A thousand pesos for its use and the knowledge how to use it."

"A thousand pesos," muttered the old woman. "Have you the money with you?"

"Aye, that I have; and I want its use for only this one night."

China waddled into an adjoining room, whence, after much delay, she brought forth a package, carefully wrapped and sealed. "You must not undo this Señor," she said, "or you will suffer, if you see the Pearl."

. . . . . .

The laughter and song in the adobe *casita* stopped at a knock on the outer door, and Ned Warren's pretty Acapulcan answered the summons. A neat parcel was handed her by the messenger, which she eagerly unfolded. "With the compliments of ——" it said, but she knew the handwriting.

"How funny, at this hour," she thought; but her snapping black eyes danced with glee as she undid the parcel and found it to contain an immense black pearl, set in beaten yellow metal of quaint workmanship. At her exclamation of delight the others grouped about, and their object of admiring glances was laid upon the table for inspection.

An instinctive shudder passed through Sanford as Muriella laid it under the candle light. It seemed to emit a peculiar light, and a queer, prickling sensation went through his veins as he viewed the jewel—the largest of its kind he had ever seen. As he looked a feeling of exhilaration came over him, such as he had not felt during the evening.

"That last drink of *tequila* was too much," he thought, but the others, too, were beginning to evince signs of liveliness even greater than all the hilarity of the night had brought forth. A faint blue haze seemed to cover every object in the room. The figures of the girls at intervals looked far away and then near by, while a feeling of utter recklessness pervaded his whole being. All the phantasms of the opium-eater could not be more weird than those which came into Sanford's brain as his gaze was riveted on the jewel lying among the candles grouped around it on the table. In their dim light it seemed to grow and grow, emitting a demoniacal glow that, but for the spirit of recklessness which possessed him, would have filled his soul with dread.

"The fandango!" cried one of the girls, with a wild burst of laughter. "Let us dance once more, for I feel as though my feet were on fire," and when the guitar sounded the notes of the dance, the dancers seemed to enter into it with fiendish delight and boisterous enthusiasm. Back and forth they crossed, their feet pattering and stamping to the twanging of the guitar. Faster and faster their movements became, as the music seemed to fill ever fibre with its wild action.

. . . . . .

Five bodies were found dead in the adobe *casita* next morning, but with no marks of violence or other signs to show the cause of death.

The gossips of that quaint Mexican seaport tell a weird tale of a black pearl taken from the gulf, that acts upon beholders as does the loco-weed upon all who taste that evil plant; and they tell, too, of a mad dance of death years ago, when two foreigners and three beauties of the place fell exhausted about the jewel, whose demoniacal fire kept them treading the fandango till all energy was gone and life went from them.

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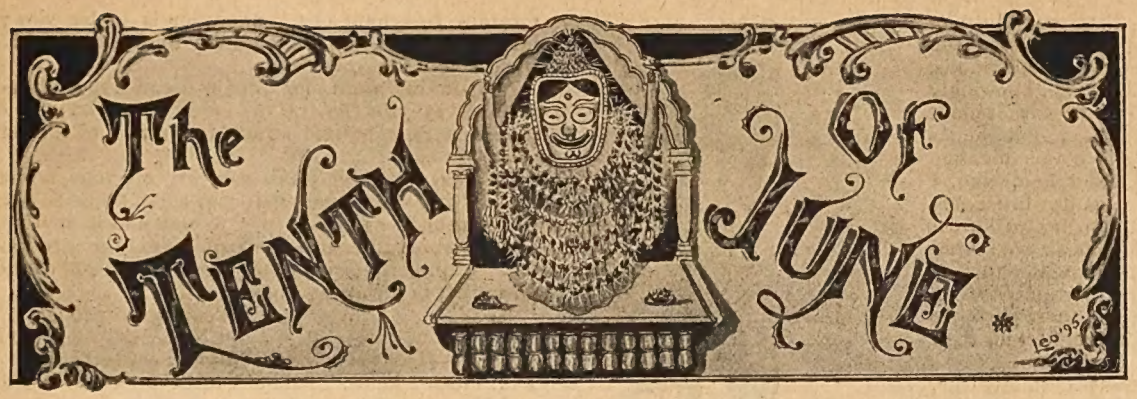


By John K. Leys, *Author of "In the Toils," "My Hindoo Friend," &c., &c.—Illustrated by* Raymond Potter.

SUMMARY.

Geoffrey Dundas—A young barrister.
Sir Arthur Chetwynd—A retired general and friend of Geoffrey.
Leila Chetwynd—His daughter.
Captain Byngham—An army officer, and cousin to Sir Arthur.
Lord Lavington—A friend of the General.
Amavati, the Rajah of Nagore—A Hindoo prince who visits Sir Arthur, and develops an unrequited love for Leila.
Chunder Sen—The Rajah's secretary.
Kuttapani—The Rajah's cook.

During the Indian Mutiny Sir Arthur, together with Geoffrey's father (since dead), took part in the looting of a Hindoo temple on the tenth of June, and on this day every year afterwards one of the Englishmen concerned, or some member of their families, is assassinated. On the last day of May, 1884, Amavati, the Rajah of Nagore, visits Sir Arthur, and Geoffrey tells him of the danger. Sir Arthur on learning from his lawyer that his cousin, Captain Byngham, to whom he had intended to marry Leila, is almost penniless, though representing himself to be rich, wills him but a small annuity. Chunder Sen makes it possible for Byngham to surreptitiously examine the will, and promises to help him out of the difficulty. On the tenth of June Geoffrey goes to Wales, and is followed by Kuttapani, who attacks him in a lonely spot and leaves him for dead. Geoffrey, however, recovers, and tracks him to a house in Westbourne Park, named Lancaster Villa, which transpires to be the headquarters of the Hindoo. Geoffrey asks the General for Leila's hand, but is refused, and goes abroad. On his return he meets the Rajah outside Lancaster Villa, and subsequently discovers that Captain Byngham is in league with the Hindoos.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FOREWARNED.

Sir Arthur Chetwynd was sitting on a garden-seat, under the shade of a fine old beech tree on his lawn; at his side was a large bundle of letters and newspapers, some opened, others unopened. Sir Arthur had been from home, and this heap of correspondence had accumulated during his absence. He had only arrived late on the preceding evening, and had postponed the task of opening his letters till after breakfast.

Among these letters was one addressed in a handwriting that was evidently disguised. To his surprise, the General found that the letter inside was written by Geoffrey Dundas.

After reading the first few lines, Sir Arthur's face changed. He became very pale; and the lines in his cheeks deepened. He read a little further, and gave a start.

"Is anything the matter, papa?"

Leila had stolen up to him unobserved.

"No, child, no; but I am busy. I don't wan't to be disturbed. Here, take these"—thrusting some unopened illustrated papers into her hand. "Just go off somewhere, will you? and look at the pictures. I want to be alone just at present."

He spoke in a peremptory, harsh tone, though he was not conscious of the fact; and the tears sprang to the girl's eyes.

"He treats me like a child," she said to herself. "I can see that something has happened to cause him pain or anxiety, and he expects me to go away and look at pictures, as if I were a baby."

But Leila knew her father too well to utter a word of remonstrance. She took the newspapers, and went slowly back into the house.

"Let me see what this foolish boy says," said the General to himself, beginning to read the former part of the letter again before finishing it. "I wonder if it is all sober earnest, or if the poor fellow's nerves have been shaken by those attempts to murder him. He seems to have written under some strong excitement." He pulled down his straw hat over his eyes, laid down his cigar, and fixed his eyes on the sheet of paper before him.

"I have just discovered," wrote Geoffrey, "that those rascally Hindoos intend to make a serious attack on you; and I believe it will occur on the old date—the tenth of June. I cannot now enter into particulars of the method by which I came into possession of this knowledge; but I do beseech you not to disregard the warning. Not only you, but your daughter, are in great danger; and I have positive certainty—not merely suspicion, but certainty—that your cousin Captain Byngham is in some way connected with the plot."

Here the General stopped, and shook his head.

"That I can't believe," he said aloud. "Byngham may be a spendthrift, for anything I know; but he never would be—good Heavens!—a murderer! Geoffrey must be either mad, or insanely jealous, to hint at such a thing."

Yet the next words in the letter made him feel that he had done Geoffrey an injustice.

"I do not believe—it would take a great deal to make me

*"Is anything the matter, papa?"*

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believe—that your kinsman has anything to do with the main object of the Hindoos, or that he would knowingly be a party to any attempt on your life; but he is certainly in communication with Chunder Sen, who, I have no doubt, instigated Kuttapani to try to murder me. He has allowed himself to become the tool of these men for purposes of his own, and these purposes have your daughter for their object.

*Began to pace up and down the lawn.*

"All this is certainly true, for I overheard part of a conversation between them, and their words could bear no other meaning. I could learn nothing of the details of the plot, except that it is intended to be carried out on board ship, and that Captain Byngham is to play the part of rescuer to Miss Chetwynd, and so win your gratitude and hers. This, at least, is the arrangement. Whether he will be allowed to carry out such a scheme, or whether his Hindoo allies will play him false, throw him over, and——"

The sentence had been left unfinished. The General drew his breath hard, and read on.

"You will think that I am mad. I am not mad, but I confess I am almost beside myself to think that we are comparatively so helpless against these malignant enemies, with their secret methods and their undying hate. It encourages me to think that a little more knowledge of their plans would enable us to defeat them, this time at all events, without trouble, and that without that knowledge we must run tremendous risks.

"The question is, what can we do? I think you should come up to town and see me, when we could perhaps hit upon some way of eluding the danger that threatens you. At any rate, I beg you to allow me to become your guest for the ninth and tenth of next month. Knowing that danger threatens your daughter as well as yourself, I cannot remain away from you."

The General bit his lip, and turned to the date of the letter. It was more than a week old; and a look of perplexity came into the Anglo-Indian's handsome face.

"I can't have that. I really can't have that," he said to himself. "Luckily I wasn't at home when this arrived, and now that the yachting trip is settled, of course the thing is impossible. And yet, if there really *is* any danger threatened, Geoffrey would be the very fellow to have at one's back. But there can't be—there can't be. On board Lavington's yacht there can be no danger. Geoffrey himself said so last year. He will be relieved to hear that we are to spend next week at sea. I must write and tell him at once."

The General went back to his letter:

"As to your own movements, if I may venture to give you advice, I would say, whatever you may have intended doing, *change your plans at the last moment*, taking good care that not a living soul, not even Miss Chetwynd, knows that you purpose changing them. That is your only safe course. If you have given out that you are to be at home on the tenth, go somewhere on the ninth, you and Miss Chetwynd—to London for example. But if you have thought of spending the tenth of June at sea, change your mind at the last moment, and stay quietly at home, allowing no stranger to approach the premises.

"One word more. I know that your friend the Rajah is in communication with your enemies. Innocent communication it may be. I don't know. You will know best whether it will be prudent to have him as a guest under your roof on the coming tenth of June. But as to two men there can be no doubt. I do hope that you will permit no scruples about hospitality to stand in the way of your safety; and if either Captain Byngham or Chunder Sen is to be with you on the fatal tenth, it is quite imperative that you should get rid of them before that day."

"Upon my word our young friend is very free with his advice," said the General to himself with a smile. Apparently the same thought had struck the writer of the letter, for he went on to say:

"I fear you will think me very officious, perhaps impertinent; but I can't help that. If I had failed to put the thing in the strongest possible light to you, and if anything were to happen through your neglect of obvious precautions—forgive me. I am perhaps offending again. But you cannot imagine how great is my anxiety!

"Your most devoted

"G. L. D.

"P.S.—The conspirators' plans involve *the use of a boat*. That much I know. I should therefore think it safer for you and Miss Chetwynd to keep on shore, and not even go down to the beach, until some days after the tenth."

Here the letter abruptly ended.

The General rose, and began to pace up and down the lawn, with his hands, in one of which he still held Geoffrey's letter, folded behind his back.

"Poor fellow, he is terribly anxious," he said to himself; "and I daresay he has discovered some evidence that those blackguards have got hold of Byngham. What for, I wonder? Probably as a spy. But in any case we are safe—absolutely safe. On board the old yacht it might have been different; but in the new yacht, a fine steamer, five hundred tons burden, with a strong crew of English sailors, most of whom are personally known to Lavington—Danger? Pooh! The thing is impossible.

"Yet, Chunder Sen! I confess I should feel easier if he were to be left behind."

Half mechanically the General went back to the garden seat, where he had left the little heap of unopened letters; and opened one of them. As soon as he had read the first few lines, his face cleared wonderfully.

The letter was from Chunder Sen, writing in his capacity of secretary to the Rajah. He wrote, he said, by his master's permission, and at his master's request, to say that neither his religion nor his health—he was extremely liable to sea-sickness in its worst form—permitted him to make one of the party on board the *Aphrodite*. With the Rajah's and the illustrious General's permission, he and the other members of the Rajah's suite would return to London on the ninth of June—the day fixed for the *Aphrodite* to leave Plymouth. And as the Rajah would require an attendant he would feel obliged if the General would allow one of his own servants to accompany him as his valet; or, if not, he could, perhaps, recommend an English servant who would not object to a sea trip to serve for the occasion.

Such was the purport of the Hindoo's letter.

The General gave a little exultant laugh as he tossed the letter down again among the others on the garden-seat. There was just to his mind one element of real danger in the situation—the Hindoos whom the Rajah might chance to bring with him in his suite; and this danger had been removed by the Rajah's own act! Of the Rajah himself Sir Arthur had never been suspicious.

To suppose that *he* would descend to be an assassin was absurd. And he now proposed to leave all his attendants behind, except one, and that one an Englishman, to be selected by the General himself.

Nothing could have been better. This decided the question of giving up the intended yacht expedition, which Sir Arthur had never, in his own mind, intended to abandon. No asylum could now be safer than Lord Lavington's yacht. Chunder Sen and his fellow countrymen might possibly reach him in London, or even at Seacombe Towers, but not on the open sea.

With a pleased smile on his face, very different from its former expression of stern anxiety, Sir Arthur proceeded to open the rest of his letters. Among them was a second one from Geoffrey Dundas, written a[bout] a week after the other.

"I was so surprised and ar[xious]" wrote Geoffrey, "at not hearing from you, that I se[nt] down to Seacombe Towers,

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to make inquiries. He reported that you were from home, and I concluded that you had left directions that your letters were not to be forwarded. But I have no doubt you will get my former letter before sailing.

"I can only repeat my earnest hope, that you will change your plans with the utmost secrecy before the tenth of June. Make some excuse to Lord Lavington, if you are engaged to take another cruise with him, and join the yacht, if you will, later on—anything rather than aid your deadly enemies by carrying out arrangements which must be known to them, and on which they must have calculated.

"I would come to you to urge you by word of mouth to take my advice, but I cannot leave this place at present; and, after all, I could hardly say more to you than I have said in my former letter. I trust you will not stir out of doors on the tenth of this month. May I beg you to give my kind remembrances to Miss Chetwynd?

"Yours very faithfully,

"GEOFFREY L. DUNDAS."

"Poor lad!" said the General, half aloud, in a compassionate tone, as he folded up the letter, "he has got those rascally Hindoos on the brain. And no wonder, I must say, after the experience he has had of them! 'Can't leave this place,' he says. Where is he, then?"

He unfolded the letter again and glanced at the top of the first page.

"Oh! Asnières; some town in France, I suppose. What craze can have taken him there? I will write to him at once, and tell him not to be under any anxiety on our account. With Lavington we shall be as safe as if we were in the Tower of London. I wonder if Lavington means to take this opportunity——"

The General's thoughts did not shape themselves in words after this point; but he could not help wondering why Lord Lavington had not already asked Leila to be his wife. The fact was that Lavington was a slow, cautious man; and he had decided, twelve months before, that it would be as well to see a little more of Miss Chetwynd, charming as she certainly was, before taking the irrevocable step.

He had a remarkably high opinion of the greatness of the house of which he was the head, and a tolerably good opinion of himself. Lady Churchwood had a young friend of her own, whom she had destined, in her own mind, to be her sister-in-law; and her brother's attitude to Leila on the night of the dance in London had opened her eyes, and made her

*Let fall some slighting remark.*

*"Where is Mr. Dundas now*

regret that she had so readily yielded to him when he had asked her to send invitations to the General and his daughter.

So, with a woman's skill, she had taken the opportunity a few days later to throw cold water on the Viscount's passion, by letting fall some slighting remarks about Miss Chetwynd's appearance. She did not speak ill-naturedly—she had more sense than that; but she let her brother understand that she looked on the General's daughter as a countrified miss, quite unfit to fill a place in the "smart" world.

These remarks sank into the Viscount's mind. He did not say anything; but he was annoyed with his sister. He had thought Leila Chetwynd delightful, perfectly charming, in fact; yet Gladys did not seem to consider her quite up to the mark in some way. It would not do for him, he acknowledged to himself with a sigh, to marry a woman who was not in all respects worthy to wear a coronet.

He turned the matter over in his mind a good deal, and finally came to the conclusion that Miss Chetwynd was good enough for anybody. What did it matter if her childlike delight in amusements and scenes which were everyday, common-place affairs in the world of fashion were such as to amuse women of the world like Gladys? She would soon throw off that unsophisticated style.

He resolved to ask the General and Leila to join their yachting party for a trip to the Mediterranean in the spring. He would then be able to renew his acquaintance with the young lady; and if she seemed as desirable as she had appeared to him during the last cruise, he would take the plunge before the yacht returned to England.

The trip to the Mediterranean had to be delayed, however, because the new yacht, the *Aphrodite*, was not quite ready for sea; and it was nearly the end of April before Lord Lavington, meeting the General one day in Plymouth, pressed him so earnestly to accept his invitation for the first cruise in the *Aphrodite* that Sir Arthur felt compelled to say "Yes."

After a little hesitation—for the General was a little hurt to think that the Viscount had not spoken to Leila during the preceding summer—he asked Lord Lavington to spend a few days at Seacombe Towers. The invitation could not be accepted, as Lavington had made engagements up to the time of the yacht sailing; but his sincerity in declaring that he would gladly have accepted the offer if his time had been at his own disposal was manifest; and the two men parted very good friends.

Leila was looking forward to the trip with even more than her usual enthusiasm. She was sure that Italy and Greece must be beautiful beyond words; she thought of the cruise all day long, and dreamt of it at night.

"Have you got through your letters by this time, papa?" she called out from the terrace.

For reply, the General beckoned to her; and Leila soon joined him on the lawn, bringing some "work" with her.

"I have just heard from Geoffrey—Mr. Dundas, I mean. He desires to be kindly remembered to you."

The General did not fail to notice the start and quick look of glad surprise that came into his daughter's eyes as he spoke.

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*Preferred the company of a little orphan niece.*

"Confound the fellow!" he said to himself. "He may have done more mischief than I know of."

"Please send him my kind regards when you write," said Leila demurely.

The General grunted, but said nothing.

"Where is Mr. Dundas now? Is he still in Canada or the States?"

The girl tried to speak in a common-place voice; but she could not control her blushes, and she felt that she was betraying herself.

"He is in France," said her father coldly.

"In France! What is he doing there?"

"I don't know. He didn't think fit to tell me."

"Papa!" cried the girl, alarmed at her father's tone, "is anything the matter—I mean anything wrong—between you and Geoffrey—I mean, Mr. Dundas?"

"Since when, Leila, have you taken to calling young men by their Christian names? But there, my dear," he added, seeing that the girl looked terribly confused, and almost as if she were going to cry, "never mind. I've no doubt your doing so was a mere accident—good thing no one but I overheard you. You must really be more careful. Geoffrey—er—I mean, Dundas seems all right."

"Don't you like him, papa, as well as you used to do?"

"Like him! Of course. Why shouldn't I like him?"

"Why doesn't he come down here?"

"How can I tell? I don't suppose he has been in England since his return."

Leila would have liked to hint that an invitation might be sent to him; but she did not dare to say more.

"I expect the Rajah on Friday," said the General abruptly.

"Oh, that reminds me! Papa, I meant to ask you as a favour to let me invite Jane and Emily Stoddart to stay with me while he is here."

"Hum, my dear! They were here the last time the Rajah was here. Won't it look just a little odd?"

"Odd, papa? No! How? Why?"

"Why do you want them?"

"To keep me in countenance. You see, with the Hindoo for our only guest, if I am alone in the house——"

"It might be awkward for you—I see—I see. Very well, my dear, have them by all means. And their father, too, if he'll come. A British officer is surely good enough company for an Indian prince, whatever the difference in their purses may be."

"Thank you, papa. I will ask him; and I am sure he will be pleased with the invitation, whether he accepts it or not. Is it quite settled, about our trip?"

"Quite settled, my love. Why do you ask?"

"I was afraid something might interfere to prevent our going. It seems almost too good to be true that we are to go on such a delightful cruise!"

"No, my dear," said the General, lighting his long-neglected cigar, and settling himself down behind the *Times*; "nothing has happened to prevent our going, and nothing is likely to happen. God willing, we sail on the ninth—and lucky it is the ninth," he added, under his breath. "If it had happened to be the tenth that had been fixed for our departure, that foolish boy, Geoffrey, would have been ready to swear we would never come back; and I, myself—well, under the circumstances, I confess I should *not* have cared to sail on the tenth of June."

## CHAPTER XX.

### TRAPPED.

ON the day after this conversation, Jane and Emily Stoddart arrived at Seacombe Towers. The Lieutenant excused himself. He was too old, he said, to care for society. He preferred the company of a little orphan niece who shared his house, his pipe, and his newspaper, to that of all the Hindoos in creation.

A day or two later the Rajah made his appearance, bringing with him Chunder Sen and two Hindoo servants.

The house party was not so gay as that of the year before had been; but the Rajah seemed to be enjoying himself in a quiet way.

He played at chess a good deal, sometimes with the General, sometimes with one of the Stoddart girls, both of whom were very fair players. He made several attempts to teach Leila the royal game; but she always declared, after a quarter of an hour's close attention, that she was too stupid to learn; and the Hindoo relinquished the effort with a sigh, and a bow which made the simple English girl feel almost as if she were being ridiculed.

But the ninth of June, the day of departure, was fast approaching; and soon everybody who was to be of the yachting party was busy with preparations—all but the Rajah. He never seemed to concern himself about anything. His arrangements were all made days beforehand; his wishes were carried out with the certainty and smoothness of clock-work.

He never was in a hurry, never showed more than a languid interest in any subject of conversation. There was an aloofness about him that would have distinguished him from the rest of mankind—Anglo-Saxon mankind, at all events—even if his skin had been as white as an Englishman's.

One of the General's footmen, a young fellow named Brown, volunteered to sail with the party as personal attendant to the Rajah; and for two or three days he had to submit to be instructed by the Rajah's valet in his new duties.

The ninth of June fell that year on a Saturday. It had been arranged that the *Aphrodite* should leave the Thames, where she was taking in stores, in time to reach Plymouth on Saturday forenoon, and the final start was to be made on Sunday, or early on Monday morning. Lord Lavington and his friends were to embark at Gravesend, while the General and his party were to leave Seacombe Towers on Saturday morning, and join the yacht at Plymouth on the afternoon of the same day.

*A drizzling rain was falling.*

On Thursday of

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that week Chunder Sen and the Hindoo who acted as the Rajah's personal attendant left for London. A difficulty had arisen as to providing a cook for the Rajah; but this was fortunately overcome.

One of the General's old army friends who lived near London had a Hindoo servant who had been with him for many years, and had proved himself to be thoroughly trustworthy; and the General asked his friend to let this man accompany the Rajah in the capacity of cook, if he could be spared a few weeks.

The Hindoo was willing to go, and the old Anglo-Indian was delighted to oblige his friend; so it was agreed that the man should join the *Aphrodite* at once, in London. The Rajah's own cook was to leave his master at Plymouth and proceed to join his fellow-countrymen in town.

On Friday forenoon, while Leila was kneeling beside a trunk in her little boudoir, her father burst into the room, his face a fiery red, and an open telegram in his hand.

"Here's a pretty thing to ask!" he cried out. "Confound the man's impudence, I say. I shan't go! I shan't change my arrangements for any peer in the country."

"What is it, papa? I don't understand," said Leila, rising to her feet.

"Just listen——" and the General read the telegram aloud:

"'Yacht *Aphrodite*, Plymouth, Friday morning. Compelled to sail at latest daybreak, Saturday morning. Can you possibly join us here to-night? So sorry to put you to inconvenience, but cannot possibly be helped. Our sailing on Saturday a necessity. Will explain when we meet. Please wire reply. Will wait arrival of last train. — LAVINGTON.'

"There! What do you think of that? Do you call that civil? To invite us weeks ago to take this confounded cruise, and then change the time of joining at the last moment. I shan't go!"

"Oh, papa!"

Leila's hands hung down by her sides. She looked the picture of despair.

"Why couldn't he have let us know sooner?"

"I suppose they have just arrived in the yacht from London."

"Then why couldn't he have telegraphed before leaving town? Eh?"

"I don't know, papa, I'm sure."

"It is treating me with something like—with a want of that consideration which is due to a guest," said Sir Arthur, in his grandest manner. "I will not go."

"But the Rajah, papa?"

"The Rajah is a gentleman. He will see the matter as I do. But I am sorry, I am *humiliated*, to think that one of our aristocracy should put this affront on him."

"Papa, don't you take this matter a little too seriously? After all, Lord Lavington ——"

"Seriously! Too seriously! Upon my word!"

"I beg your pardon, papa; I do indeed!"

"That's right, my girl."

"Of course, I shall be *awfully* disappointed."

"I am sorry; but I see no help for it."

There was a silence, during which Sir Arthur stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out of the window. Then an inspiration came to Leila. She waited for a minute or two, and then said in a tone which was certainly unusual with her:

*"There's some sort of entertainment on board to-night."*

"It is abominable conduct in Lord Lavington! It is unpardonable. I suppose you will cut him next time you meet."

"I'm not sure, my dear," answered her father, after a pause, "that that would be the proper course to take. It seems hardly important enough for that. I don't think I would be justified in cutting him."

"He ought to have told you the reason of his changing his plans"

"Perhaps it was too long to be explained in a telegram."

"Well, it doesn't matter. *I* shall never speak to him again."

The General walked up and down the room, thoughtfully pulling his moustache. Now that he saw the thing a little closer, in the light of Leila's remarks, his anger was beginning to cool down.

There *might* be some really urgent reason for setting off a day sooner than had been intended. Lavington might wish to avoid having to ask some bore to accompany them. At any rate, it was civil in him to bring the yacht round to Plymouth for them, when they were in such a hurry to be off.

And it would be a pity to upset all the arrangements—Leila's whole future might depend on her going. And Lavington was really a good sort of fellow. "He *must* have had some strong reason for putting us all to such great inconvenience," said the General.

Leila, standing by, watched her father's face.

"It really doesn't matter, papa; and there isn't time now to pack up in time to catch the evening train."

This was touching the old campaigner on his tenderest point.

"Not time!" he growled out. "Why, I could pack for a voyage to India let alone a trip to the Mediterranean, in something under half an hour. But with *you* it may be a different matter."

"Oh, don't let me stand in the way," said Leila in an indifferent tone. "As it happens, most of my things are packed already, and I can easily be ready in time."

"Come now, Leila," said the General, smiling; "don't pretend that you don't care whether we go or stay. You would be disappointed if we didn't go, wouldn't you? You said so a little while ago."

"To tell the truth, papa, I would be more disappointed than I have ever been before, all my life!"

"Then, my darling, we will go."

He rang the bell, met the servant who answered it on the stairs, and issued half a dozen orders in as many seconds.

At half-past six that evening the General and his party left the Towers.

* * * *

It was dusk when they reached Plymouth; and a drizzling rain was falling. By the time Sir Arthur had seen his luggage loaded upon two cabs, and put his daughter and the Rajah into a third, it was almost dark.

When they got down to the sea front, they found that the wind had risen. It was coming in from the sea with a moaning sound, and sending the salt water up on the rocks in great smooth billows.

"Boat, sir?" cried half a dozen men at once, surrounding the cab in which the General was seated.

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"I want to go on board the *Aphrodite*," said the General, putting out his head.

"All right, sir. This way, sir."

"But do you know her? Have you seen her?"

"Can't say as I do, sir; but we'll find her if she's in the harbour. What sort of a vessel might she be, sir?"

"She's a steam yacht, of a hundred and fifty or two hundred tons, I fancy. She only came round from the Thames to-day."

There was a momentary silence among the group of watermen.

"Oh, *I* know," said one of them at last. "She'll be that new-looking black yacht that came in yesterday."

"Not yesterday," said the General. Then he remembered that it was only an inference of his own that the yacht had only arrived that day.

"That's her, sir, showing the white light at the side. Take you over in a jiffy."

At this moment a burly figure pressed through the crowd. "Be you for the *Aphrodite*, sir?" he asked, touching his cap.

"Yes. And you?"

"I was sent ashore for your party. Been lying here about three hours," said the man in a surly tone.

The General looked at him. He wore a sort of undress uniform, such as is worn by the petty officers on board well-appointed yachts.

"Where is your boat?" he asked sharply.

"Just down here, sir. But I have only two men in her, and they can't leave her with this wind blowing on shore," and he glanced at the pile of luggage as he spoke.

"That needn't trouble you," said the General drily. "Bear a hand, one or two of you, and carry the luggage down," he said to the men standing near.

They sprang forward at once; and a few minutes later Leila found herself seated in a boat that seemed dreadfully small and low in the water, being pulled slowly out seaward.

The General said something by way of encouragement to one of the men rowing, but the sailor did not answer him.

"They're Lascars," said the English seaman who had first accosted them.

"Oh, that will be so interesting!" whispered Leila to her father. "There were no Lascars on board the *Pallas*, were there?"

"No, my dear; there were not. And I rather wonder at Lord Lavington—however, I suppose it is usual nowadays to fill up with foreign sailors."

As he spoke, the portholes of the yacht which they were slowly approaching became lit up.

*The caged lion.*

"There's some sort of entertainment on board to-night," explained the boatswain. "Lord Lavington gave orders that if you didn't come before it began you was to be took straight to your cabins in the first place. He said you'd most likely take some supper after your journey."

"Very true," cried the General. "I, for one, shall be glad of something. And of course we must have it in our own cabins, as the saloon will be occupied."

All this time the Rajah sat without uttering a word, his eyes fixed on the yacht.

As they drew near the boatswain hailed, and an indistinct sound floated over the dark water in reply. The rain was coming down faster now, and Leila wondered whether she would be able to get to her cabin before she was wet through. Of course by this time it was quite dark, and nothing could be made out on board the *Aphrodite*. It was evident, however, that they had been heard, for a lantern was hung over the side, and a short step ladder was run down.

In a very few minutes they stood on the vessel's deck.

"This way, sir; I'll show you to your berths," said the boatswain.

The thought passed through the General's mind that Lavington might have left the saloon for a few minutes to welcome him and his daughter; but he was anxious to be under cover, and hardly gave the matter a second thought.

He found that the cabin allotted to him opened from a small open space just outside the saloon door, at the foot of the cabin stair. There was a corresponding cabin on the other, the port side of the ship; and to this Leila was conducted.

The General's cabin was of fair size and comfortably furnished. On a small tray in the lower of the two berths—there were two berths, though only one was to be occupied—was a tray with cold ham and chicken, and other eatables, as well as a decanter of sherry. The soldier eyed it wistfully, and then, deciding that he might as well eat first and dress afterwards, he drew a camp-stool up to the side of the berth, and attacked the provisions.

Before his meal was ended he felt the throb, throb of the engines, and knew that the vessel was moving through the water.

"Hallo!" he said to himself, "Lavington has lost no time. I remember he said they must sail at daybreak at latest. I suppose he thinks we may as well escape from this climate—and quite right too."

Having finished supper the General went to his cabin door to call the steward.

The door was locked.

"I say! What the dickens!"

Even then no suspicion of treachery crossed Sir Arthur's mind. He simply supposed that some bolt had been accidentally pushed home, or that something was the matter with the lock.

He knocked on the door, and called aloud.

No answer.

He knocked again, and before an answer could have come it seemed as if a lightning flash had darted through his brain, withering up all ideas, all feelings but one—they were trapped, they were prisoners!

"My God!" cried the old man, clutching his heart.

In that one moment he seemed to taste the bitterness of many deaths.

*Could* he be mistaken?

He sprang to the door, and rained blows upon it, then paused to listen. No sound but one only—Leila's voice answered him indistinctly.

"Oh, Father in Heaven! My innocent child!" cried the unhappy man, sinking on his knees. "Let not my past sins be visited on her head!"

For a few seconds he remained so, his face covered with his hands.

Then he sprang to his feet. It was well for Chunder Sen and his friends that none of them were at that moment within reach of the caged lion.

Lifting his foot he drove it with all his force upon the lower panel. It split—and revealed the fact that two narrow, but thick, pieces of wood had been fastened lengthwise on the outside of the door. The cabin had been converted into a cell.

He put his face down to the split panel and called out:

"Leila! Leila, my darling, do you hear me?"

"Yes, papa, I can hear you. But I can't get out. Somebody has locked the door, or else the lock is out of order Was it you who made that dreadful noise?"

"Yes, it was I, my child. I, too, want to get out."

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"Have both our doors got fastened? Why doesn't somebody come and open them?"

"Because, my love—Leila, you are a brave girl, I know. Remember you are a soldier's daughter."

"Yes, papa."

"Can you bear some very bad news?"

"I will try."

"You won't faint? You must not faint, for no help can come to you if you do."

"No, papa, I won't faint. But what does this all mean? I can't understand it."

"My dear, I'm afraid I've made a dreadful mistake. I don't think we are on board Lord Lavington's yacht at all!"

"Oh, how funny! And they have shut us up, taking us for bad characters, I suppose. But why don't the people of the yacht come and let us explain who we are?"

The General could not speak.

"Why don't they come, papa, or send someone?"

"My child, I fear that the yacht does not belong to—to honest people."

"You don't mean *pirates*, papa?"

"Something of that sort. What they mean to do with us, I don't know."

"Do you mean we shall have to pay ransom for our lives?"

"Perhaps. But, Leila, my dear, since I have got you into this horrible mess, try to put a bold front on it. We are quite helpless, I fear, at present. We must put our trust in God that no harm will befall us. Is there a lock on your door?"

"There is a bolt."

"Bolt the door, then, so that it cannot be opened during the night. And—you have blankets, and sheets, and so on?"

"Yes, the berth is ready."

"Take off some of your things then, and lie down. Try to sleep, and perhaps sleep will come. Promise me that you will."

"Yes, I will try. But isn't it all very, *very* strange?"

"Yes, my darling. But I can tell you no more."

"Good night, then, papa. Isn't the yacht moving."

"Yes, I know she is."

"Where are we bound for, then?"

"Ah, my darling, I wish I could tell you!"

"Well, good night, papa. You must try to sleep, too!"

"Brave girl!" cried the General to himself. "Not a cry, not a tear, though she must know, she must guess, that we are in terrible danger."

It may be imagined that the General did not close his eyes that night. "Oh, fool! fool! fool!" he moaned to himself. Now that it was too late, it seemed madness to have neglected Geoffrey's warning, to put implicit faith in a telegram that any one might send, to trust that villainous seaman with his Lascar comrades.

"I might have known the instant I stepped on board," he said to himself. "But by that time it was too late. And the Rajah? What has become of him? Is he a prisoner, too? No; for we should have heard him shouting. Besides, they would never dare to imprison him. Then he must be one of the gang—a traitor, a double-dyed traitor! And I would have trusted that man with my life!"

*(To be continued.)*

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# Her Answer

THE fishing fleet had set out early in the morning. The atmosphere was very clear, and the boats could still be seen in the distance, strung out in a long line across the horizon, between the Criel beach and the Points de Cayeux.

A few sailors' wives, children, and old men, still loitered on the jetty, all in excellent humour, for with such weather there should certainly be a fine haul of fish. The sea was admirably blue, but, lashed by the wind, it broke into little waves, which rushed, white-capped, towards the shore.

"Do you see it yet, mamma!" asked a little fellow who had stayed away from school that morning in order to see his father start with the fleet.

His mother had a telescope—a luxury that her neighbours envied her. In such clear weather as this if they could not distinguish the men they could at least make out the numbers on the sails.

He would have remained a long time watching his father's sloop as it grew smaller and smaller in the distance, but his mother led him away. They must go back to the house to their work.

They loitered by the side of the harbour, which had lost its animation now that its fleet of fishing craft was gone.

Madame Fournier stopped mechanically in the centre of the quay to look at a fine English three-master, the *Harding*, which came every week with a cargo of coal. A sailor, leaning over the rail of the ship, saw her, and waved his cap gaily to her. She turned away and hurried up the Rue de la Falaise to her home.

Two hours later the loungers of the Rue de la Falaise were greatly surprised to see Master Fournier, the owner of the fishing sloop T 672 hastening angrily homeward.

He had not entered the house before the neighbours had run to learn the reason of his sudden return.

Why had he come back?

It was that way that they had of leaving port with all sails set, whatever the weather, which was known all up and down the coast as "Treport sailing."

Her backstay had been broken, and Fournier had had to come back to port for repairs. These were already under way, and, once he had seen his men at work, he had come up to see his wife a moment.

"Your wife—she has gone out, but she will be back directly."

He was pouring himself out a glass of thin wine from the pitcher he had drawn that morning before leaving, when he noticed the inkstand open on the table, and the pen beside it, still wet with ink.

It was his son's pen and inkstand, but as the little fellow never wrote during the day he concluded that his wife must must have been writing. Almost at the same moment he noticed a letter in the blue vase on the mantelpiece, and, without thinking, he opened it and read:

"MADAME FOURNIER,—I love you more than I can tell. I implore you to set a time when we can meet. You are free—your husband is gone.

"HARRY EVANS."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Fournier, "Harry Evans!"

He knew him well, this handsome English sailor of the *Harding*, who had already ruined more than one home in Treport—a tall fellow, as tall as Fournier himself, fair, with the complexion of a girl and tender blue eyes.

He sprang up to rush to the quay and strangle the English-

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man when he heard his wife returning. Evidently she had answered that insulting letter, and she would tell him what answer she had given. He trusted his wife.

"I hurried back," she said, as she came in, "I heard of the accident as I was doing my marketing."

As she laid the purchase she had made on the table he had time to thrust the letter back into the vase. He would wait for her to speak.

Madame Fournier continued to busy herself with her household duties. He watched her and he found her still young, browned like himself, almost as tall, gracefully poised on her pointed sabots, and with a waist still slender.

From time to time she looked at him with a smile: she was not surprised to see him looking sombre after the accident. She did not say anything about it, for she had given him her advice on the subject long ago, and it was the sole matter on which they disagreed.

"Wife, have you nothing new to tell me?"

"Nothing, my dear husband."

His face contracted as with a sudden pain. His wife, thinking it due to chagrin at the accident, kissed him tenderly.

He pressed her to him with unaccustomed force. Never, even in the fiercest tempest, had he suffered as he suffered now. Suspicion entering his simple, loyal heart, ravaged it terribly.

"Well, good-bye. I am going to the harbour. We shall go out with the next tide if the backstay is repaired. Good-bye!"

She accompanied him to the end of the street, and bade him farewell so frankly, that he asked himself if it were possible that such a woman could lie.

He was about to go to the *Harding*, when one of his crew saw him and came after him. Compelled to return to his vessel he had time to reflect. A sudden fit of rage—a fight—would prove nothing, and he would never know the truth.

So he calmly watched the work of reparation, which was going on apace. At twelve o'clock his wife brought him his breakfast; at five his son came to kiss him good-bye; and that evening he set sail again, after having seen the *Harding* leave Treport for England.

The following Saturday, after a terrible tempest, the fishing fleet returned to Treport laden with a fine catch of fish. Master Fournier looked quickly to see if the English three-master was at the quay, but she was not there.

Disembarking, he learnt that the *Harding* had gone down in sight of Spithead, and that all on board had been lost.

Harry Evans, then, was dead. His wife alone knew the truth; he would not dare to question her; he would never know the truth—he would doubt her always!

From that time every one in Treport remarked that Master Fournier had grown taciturn. They asked his wife the reason, but she replied evasively that she did not know.

His crew found him rougher than before and more avaricious. He often returned to Treport on Sunday morning and left again the same evening without a night's rest.

One week he came back on Tuesday and the news spread that the *St. Laurent* had brought back the corpse of a drowned man. According to the custom of that part of the coast Master Fournier had given orders to return to port, losing his catch of fish in order to bury the dead.

Accompanied by two of his crew he made his deposition before the commissioner, and the latter had him sign the declaration that "the body of a drowned man had been recovered by the *St. Laurent* at a point fifteen miles south-south-west of Spithead, measuring five feet ten inches in height, dressed in a blue shirt, trousers of grey cloth and neckerchief of red cotton; no papers, no marks to establish identity; supposed, from the place of drowning, in default of other evidence, to be one of the crew of the *Harding*."

Early the next morning a funeral procession traversed the little village and bore to the church the remains of the unknown sailor found by the *St. Laurent*. Behind the coffin walked the crew of the *St. Laurent*, their master at their head, and behind the men came the wives or mothers of the sailors.

The religious ceremony was brief, but respectfully followed, and the unknown dead was conducted to the cemetery by the great family of sailors of Treport, who honour themselves in thus honouring the remains of others.

"Get yourselves ready," announced Master Fournier to his men; "we go to sea directly."

Fournier led his wife to a little knoll a few paces away from the cemetery. He wished to speak with her without witnesses.

"Wife," he said, "do you know for whom you have come to pray?"

She trembled and pressed her husband's hand. She had never seen him so solemn. "The man we have just buried was Harry Evans—wait!"

Madame Fournier turned pale. Her husband tendered her a paper, stained as if with water.

"Wife, I have doubted you. My punishment is to accuse myself of it. I read the letter he dared to write you, and I have been very miserable. The other night when this drowned man was found, I searched him. I could not show to others, not even to the commissioner, the only paper he had on him, in a little bag of oiled silk. The water had dimmed it a little, but I have read it nevertheless."

It was the answer written to the handsome English sailor by Madame Fournier.

"Sir; I love my husband; that is the sole answer I can make to your letter. I shall say nothing to my husband, for he would kill you. Never come here again."

"Wife, do you forgive me?"

"Oh, my poor husband, how you have suffered."

From that day Master Fournier grew young and gay again; but nothing can keep him from going out with all sails set.

# A TRIPLE DESTINY

I.

ALTHOUGH she was barely fifteen, the daughter of the King of Mataquin took pleasure in dwelling on the delights that must follow a maiden who was loved by a really charming prince. One morning, whilst the ladies of her bed-chamber were occupied before the great mirror in dressing her hair, which was very long and very beautiful, the Princess took it into her head to declare that she would be very glad to be married.

No doubt such an avowal was hardly the correct thing. It is not fitting that a damsel should so openly lay bare her secret thoughts on this subject. If such frankness ever ceases to be considered reprehensible, the day will not be far distant when we shall be deafened by the voices of the countless multitudes of girls, young and old, pretty and ugly, rushing through the streets and crying, "A husband, a husband!"

However, the Fairy Hulda, who was godmother to the Princess, was not angry with her for the desire that she so unceremoniously disclosed. She was an amiable fairy, full

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of indulgence, although she was not wholly devoid of a certain coldblooded jesting humour.

The doors of the bed-chamber of the Princess suddenly flew open as if by magic, and the fairy entered, gloriously clad and with a very good-humoured expression. Six little negroes, who must have been African gnomes, bore three coffers after her. These coffers were the most beautiful that ever appeared in the world. The first was made of chased silver, the second of refined gold, the third was all glittering with jewels.

"Good-day to you, god-daughter."

"Good-day, god-mother."

"So it is true that, like the impatient rosebuds that are anxious to unfold their leaves, you are in a hurry to find a husband?"

"It is true, god-mother, that I should have no great aversion to marriage if I was offered a husband such as my fancy has painted. To say all in one word, he must be like the young prince whom I see now and then—in my dreams."

"What is he like, this prince that you dream of, god-daughter?"

"Oh! more charming than any prince that mortal eyes can see!"

"That is of not much value as a description; is there nothing more?"

"In the first place, he is clothed with all the magnificence and good taste that are possible."

"Kings' sons richly clad are not rare in the neighbouring countries."

"In his exquisite face are placed lips that are fresh and rosy as a rose that is wet with early dew."

"There is no lack of princes with good mouths."

"In his blue eyes I saw so infinitely deep a sweetness, that one who looks at them imagines that he sees all the depths of heaven through two translucent sapphires."

"Hum! hum!" said the fairy. "Eyes with all that in them are not very common. Perhaps it will give you some trouble to find their fellows. Happily, as I am kind, and do not desire to expose you to the possibility of repenting of whatever choice you make, you will be allowed to marry three times. It is surely very hard if in three chances you do not meet with a husband who entirely suits you."

"What! three times, godmother?" cried the Princess, with a furious blush.

"Not all at once, of course. You must take care to put reasonable intervals between your successive weddings Besides, although you are allowed to marry three times, the fates will not force you to do so. Nothing forbids you to stop at the first, if you are happy in it. But at the worst you can have three chances. So I have brought you these three coffers. In the first, which is made of chased silver, there is a robe of white satin and point lace, which you shall wear for your first nuptials. In the second, which is of refined gold, I have caused to be put a dress embroidered with the sun and stars, which you shall wear to enrapture your second husband. And the dress for the third wedding, the most beautiful of all, is enclosed in the third coffer, that which is all glittering with jewels."

II.

Not long thereafter the nephew of the Emperor of Golconda came to the Court of the King of Mataquin to ask for the hand of the King's daughter in marriage, for the fame of her beauty had gone out through all the nations of the earth. Never had it fallen to anyone's lot to see a prince so gorgeously apparelled as this. Over satins that seemed to be made of luminous snow, and muslins light and rosy as the clouds of the dawn, he wore broidery of pearls and rubies, beryls and carbuncles that shone like blossoms of fire. The Princess was dazzled by them, and made no difficulty about marrying the nephew of the Emperor of Golconda.

She opened the coffer of chased silver, and drew from it the robe of white satin and point lace, in which she attired herself with delight for the wedding ceremony.

But it was not long before she discovered that fine feathers do not make fine birds. When her husband appeared of a morning in his dressing-gown he had nothing in common with the young prince of whom she had dreamed. Where were the tender eyes, deep and sweet as the infinite skies?

Little by little she became very despondent, often spending a whole day in her private apartments, and weeping out of sight. Thus she had all imaginable trouble to show signs of a decent grief the day that her attendants brought her the news that the nephew of the Emperor of Golconda, who was a mighty hunter, had been devoured by lions amongst the hills.

III.

When she had worn her weeds for more than six months, something began to whisper in her heart that nothing forced her to remain a widow. She felt her heart stirred by a thrill of tenderness at the sight of a cavalier who had just arrived at the Court, and who had overcome the most valiant knights of her father in the great tournament. Not only was this new-comer magnificently attired, but in his beaming face were found lips that were fresh and rosy as a rose that is wet with morning dew. The Princess could hardly restrain her joy when she learnt that this cavalier had formed the fixed design of marrying her. At once she gave her consent to this new engagement.

From the coffer of refined gold she drew the robe that was embroidered with the sun and stars, in which she clad herself with bliss on the morning of the wedding day.

But she was not long in perceiving, in spite of the rapture of kisses, that it is not enough for a prince to have beautiful attire and a mouth like a fresh-blown rose in order to assure the happiness of a damsel so exacting as herself.

Even this husband was not the Prince who had shown himself in her enchanted vision. Not his were the soft blue eyes like translucent sapphires. She grew to loathe the days and pass the nights in weeping, more unhappy than tongue can tell. The truth is, that it was a great effort for her not to smile through her tears when the news came that the cavalier—who was a knight-errant ever on the scent of adventures—had been slain by a wicked magician in an enchanted forest.

IV.

A year passed, and still the Princess had not thought of other nuptials. The two first experiences had been two painful for her to have heart to venture upon a third. She told herself that she would never find the husband of her dreams, and gave herself up to melancholy musings. But one evening, while she walked in an avenue of the royal park, she saw a youth approaching her in the dusk who seemed more beautiful than any mortal.

Was he really a human being, or rather some angel come down from Paradise? He seemed to be clad in robes of starry light. His mouth was like a fresh rose, but such a rose for beauty as never maiden found in any earthly garden. When he came beside her, there was in his blue eyes so infinitely deep a sweetness that she seemed to gaze at all the depths of heaven through two translucent sapphires.

This time, at last, she had found the mate whom she longed for. He stood beside her, like in all points to the delightful apparition of her dream. When he said, in a voice softer than the murmuring of the breeze upon the water, "Will you marry me, beautiful Princess?" she felt as if overcome by such languor that she seemed to be dying of too much happiness.

When the day of the nuptial ceremony arrived she opened the last coffer, which was all glittering with precious stones, in order to take from it the robe of the third wedding, which was to be the most beautiful of all.

But in the coffer there lay one strange garment. It was a linen shroud.

Then the Princess began to mourn, for she understood that the moment of her death was at hand. Taken with a sudden illness, she gave up the ghost before the fall of night. Her attendants wrapped her in the linen shroud, and laid her reverently in the coffer that glittered with precious stones. For to no one here below is it given to grasp the full fruition of an ideal. It is not upon this earth that princesses marry princes who have at once magnificent apparel, lips fresh as flowers, and eyes in which are seen the infinite blue depths of heaven.

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# IN TERROR OF DEATH.

"You know," said Manuel, "what a sorrowful day for Tarragona was the 28th of June, 1811. But you cannot imagine the horrors attending the city. You did not see 5,000 Spaniards perish in ten hours; you did not see houses and churches in flames; you did not see unarmed old men and helpless women slaughtered in cold blood; you did not see pillage and drunkenness mingling with murder; you did not see, in short, one of the greatest exploits of the conqueror of the world, the hero of our age, the demi-god Napoleon!

"I saw it all. I saw the sick rise from their bed of suffering, dragging after them their sheets, like shrouds, to perish at the hands of foreign soldiers on the threshold over which the day before had passed the Viaticum! I saw lying in the street the body of a woman they had slaughtered, and at her side her infant, still nursing at its dead mother's breast. I saw the husband, with hands tied together, witnessing the murder of his wife; children weeping with terror at the horrors that surrounded them; despair and innocence taking refuge in suicide; impiety insulting the dead.

"Dangerously wounded and unable to take further part in the conflict, I fled for refuge to Clara's house.

"Full of anguish and terror, she stood at the window fearing for my life and risking her own to see me in case I should chance to pass through the street.

"I entered and fastened the door, but my pursuers had already caught sight of Clara—and she was so beautiful.

"They saluted her with a roar of savage joy and a burst of brutal laughter. A moment more and the door would yield to the axe and the flames. We were lost!

"Clara's mother, carrying in her arms her year-old babe, led us to the cistern or reservoir of the house, which was very deep and which was now dry, as no rain had fallen for several months, and there we concealed ourselves. This cistern, the floor of which might measure eight yards square, and which was entered by a steep underground flight of steps, narrowed, towards the top, like the mouth of a well, and opened into the centre of the courtyard, where a breast-work was built round it, above which two buckets were suspended from hooks attached to an iron bar for drawing water.

"The child I have spoken of, whose name was Miguel, was Clara's brother, that is to say, the youngest child of the unhappy woman whom the French had just made a widow.

"In the cistern we four might find safety. Seen from the yard, the cistern seemed a simple well. The French would think we had made our escape by the roof.

"They soon declared that such was the case, uttering horrible imprecations while they rested themselves in the shady yard, in the centre of which was the cistern.

"Yes, we were saved! Clara bound up my bleeding hand, her mother nursed Miguel, and I, although I was shivering from the chill which had followed the fever caused by my wound, smiled with happiness.

"At this moment we noticed that the soldiers, wishing, doubtless, to slake their thirst, were trying to draw water from the cistern in which we were concealed.

"Picture to yourself our anguish at that instant!

"We drew aside to make way for the bucket, which descended until it touched the floor.

"We scarcely dared to breathe.

"The bucket was drawn up again.

"'The well is dry,' cried the soldiers.

"'There must be water upstairs,' exclaimed one.

"'They are going away!' we all said to ourselves.

"'What if they should be concealed in this well,' cried a voice in Catalan.

"It was a renegade—a Spaniard—who had betrayed us.

"'What nonsense!' responded the Frenchman. 'They could not have got down there so suddenly.'

"'That is true,' responded the renegade.

"They did not know that the cistern could be entered by an underground passage, whose door or trap, carefully concealed in the floor of a dark cellar somewhat distant from the house, it would be impossible to discover. We had, however, committed the imprudence of locking the iron grating which cut off the communication between the cistern and the passage, and we could not open it without making a great deal of noise.

"Imagine, then, the cruel fluctuations between hope and fear, with which we had listened to the dialogue carried on by those wretches on the very brink of the well. From the corners in which we were crouching we could see the shadows of their heads, moving within the circle of light on the floor of the cistern. Every second seemed to us a century.

"At this moment the babe Miguel began to cry.

"But at his first whimper his mother silenced the sounds that threatened to betray our hiding-place, pressing the infant's tender face to her bosom.

"'Did you hear that?' cried some one in the yard above.

"'I heard nothing,' responded another.

"'Let us listen,' said the renegade.

"Three horrible minutes passed.

"Miguel struggled to get his voice, and the more closely his mother pressed his face into her bosom, the more violent were his struggles.

"But not the slightest sound was audible.

"'It must have been an echo,' exclaimed the soldiers.

"And they all took their departure, and we could hear the noise of their steps and the clanking of their sabres slowly dying away in the direction of the gate.

"The danger was passed.

"But, alas! our deliverance had come too late.

"Baby Miguel neither cried nor struggled now.

"He was dead!"


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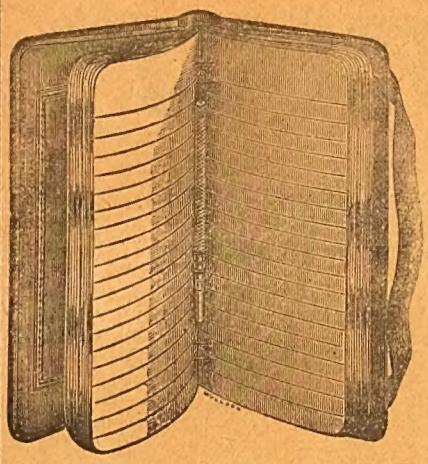

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